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The Effect of Secondary School Students' Familial Characteristics On Loneliness Levels

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Abstract

In this study, whether loneliness levels of 6, 7, 8 class secondary school students were differentiated with respect to their familial characteristics was investigated. The study was conducted on 1993 students, 1013 of which are female and 980 of which are male, trained in 2010-2011 education period in Eskisehir city from Turkey. By this study, it was found that students' loneliness levels show difference in relation to parents' education levels, parents' togetherness, number of siblings, level of income and father's status of work. The results were discussed in the light of literature and necessary suggestions to prevent children from experiencing loneliness were offered.

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1. Introduction

Having psycho-social behaviour, mankind needs to establish close relationships with the others, to share the lives of the others, to prove himself within a social group during all age periods. Change of social and cultural structure in today's world and fast lifestyle resulting from technological improvements has brought about some difficulties. Loneliness is encountered at increasing rate as one of the problems commonly experienced by mankind who tries to adapt these changes.

In the literature, loneliness was described differently by various authors. According to Asher and Paquette (2003, s.75), loneliness is "cognitive awareness of person's inadequacy in social and personal relations resulted in feelings such as unhappiness, emptiness, longing". Weiss (1973) evaluated loneliness as a reaction to deficiency of social relations which person needs or absence of closeness, sincerity and emotionalism in social relationships when person has various types of these relationships. Similarly, Booth said that loneliness would be experienced by people who are deprived of communication skills as means of meaningful interactions with others and have a difficulty in building close relationship with others. It is commonly stated that loneliness is an unpleasant feeling state stemming from difference between person's social relationships which he/she has at present and those which he/she desires (Perlman&Peplau, 1981, s. 31). As can be seen, loneliness is an undesirable situation resulted from social relation deficiency and afflicts people.

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Mainly perceived as a situation experienced by adults, loneliness is recognised as one of the major problems of especially children and adolescents (Asher, Hymel and Renshaw, 1984; Demir and Tarhan, 2001). This view is suggested by many investigations. Asher, Hymel and Renshaw (1984) reported that more than 10% of primary school students feel lonesome. Berguno, Leoux, McAinsh and Shaikh (2004) stated that primary school students in the 8-10 age group experience loneliness at a rate of 80% in the school. Antognoli-Toland (2000) expressed that adolescents and young adults are affected by loneliness at a rate of 20%-50%, and Manfusa (2001) stated that loneliness could be a universal problem regardless of ethnic backgrounds. Adolescence is long and difficult stage of human life. This period is a process in which inconsistent, ambivalent and confused feelings are experienced (Yavuzer, 2002). There are many reasons for loneliness of adolescents such as developmental, social, cultural, personal and familial characteristics. In the literature, family is accepted as a significant contributing factor to loneliness in adolescents. Individuals experiencing loneliness reported that their parents did not allow enough time and show close affinity with them during their childhood (Hojat, 1982). Defective relations also lead to loneliness in adolescents (Antognoli-Toland and Beard, 1999). It was observed that adolescents having negative attitude towards their fathers feel more lonesome (Le Roux, 2009) while those who have close relations with their parents feel less lonely (Rotenberg, 1999). Adolescents experiencing loneliness were found to display physical and psychological symptoms, to be inclined to exhibit risky behaviour such as alcoholism, suicide, skipping school etc. (Antognoli-Toland and Beard, 1999), and not to be able to cope well with stress (Demirtaş, 2007). Moreover, loneliness which could not be overcome in childhood is accepted as a problem to be resolved at the proper time because it can bring about depression in later life.

There are many studies in Turkey investigating the relationship between loneliness and different variables such as age, gender, socio-economic level, parents' education levels etc. (Öztürk, 1997; Duyan et al., 2008; Eldeleklioğlu, 2008). However, the effects of familial characteristics such as parents' education levels, parents' togetherness, level of income, father's state of work, sibling number etc. on loneliness were not investigated thoroughly. In addition, most of the studies were conducted on adolescents attending high school or university and did not sufficiently analyse the sample groups consisting of secondary school students.

The main objectives of this study were to investigate the effect of familial characteristics on loneliness concept having an important place in adolescence and reveal the meaning of these variables for secondary school students. It is considered that this study will provide data for important familial characteristics which have contribution to loneliness in adolescence. Towards these main objectives, it was investigated by this study whether secondary school students' loneliness levels show difference in relation to parents' education levels, parents' status of work, parents' togetherness, sibling number and level of income.

1. Method

This study was conducted on secondary school students in Eskisehir city from Turkey in 2010-2011 school years. The sample of present study included 1993 students (1013 female, 980 male) by using stratified and randomly sampling method. A total of 2236 students participated in the study but 234 students who fill the measurement tool incompletely or wrongly were excluded from the sample group.

2.1. Data collection tools

The data on loneliness levels of the students was collected by "School-Based Loneliness Scale for Children", which is developed by Asher & Wheeler (1985) and transcribed to Turkish by Kaya (2005), and findings related to independent variables were obtained by "Personal Information Form" prepared by the investigator. A total of 23 items, 15 of which are real and 8 of which are filling, present in School-Based Loneliness Scale for Children. The scale requires 5-point Likert-type response. When filling items are excluded, the maximum score taken from 15 real items will be 75 and the minimum score will be 15. High scores obtained from the scale reflect high level of loneliness while low scores represent low level of loneliness (Kaya, 2005). In the present study, the students' arithmetic mean point and standard deviation value from School-Based Loneliness Scale for Children were obtained as $\bar{X}=23.78$ and $s=8.98$, respectively.

2.2. Analysis of the data

Whether the secondary school students' loneliness scores show difference in respect of parents' education levels, parents' togetherness, number of siblings and level of income was examined by one-way analysis of variance. When difference was found to be significant, Tukey and Tamhane tests were used to investigate the reason for the difference. Whether the students' loneliness levels show difference in respect to parents' status of work was analysed by "t test for independent groups". Significance level was accepted as .05 for all statistical analyses. However, significant values at the level of .01 are also stated.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The findings on secondary school students' loneliness scores in relation to their familial characteristics

Whether the secondary school students' loneliness scores show difference in respect of parents' education levels, parents' togetherness, number of siblings and level of income was examined by one-way analysis of variance. In addition, loneliness scores differentiate or not in respect to parents' status of work was analysed by "t test for independent sample groups". The results are given in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1. The results of one-way analysis of variance obtained from relationship between secondary school students' familial characteristics and loneliness scores

	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	sd	Average of Squares	F	p	Significance
Mother's education level			4	694.67			1-2*
	Intergroup	2778.68					1-3*
	Intragroup	157943.9	1998	79.44	8.74	.000*	1-4*
	Total	160722.6	1992				1-5*
Father's education level			4	1020.53			2-4*
	Intergroup	4082.14					1-5*
	Intragroup	156626.2	1987	78.82	12.94	.000*	2-5*
	Total	160708.3	1991				3-4*
Parents' togetherness			3	356.29			3-5*
	Intergroup	1068.87					
	Intragroup	159653.6	1989		4.439	.004*	
	Total	160722.6	1992	80.26			
Number of siblings			2	517.50			
	Intergroup	1035					
	Intragroup	159687.6	1990	80.24	6.44	.002*	1-3*
	Total	160722.6	1992				2-3*
Level of income			2	2139.9			
	Intergroup	4279.8					
	Intragroup	156432.4	1989	78.6	27.20	.000*	1-2*
	Total	160712.3	1991				1-3*
							2-3*

*p<.01

3.1.1. The students' loneliness levels with respect to parents' education levels

According to the findings in Table 1, there is a significant difference in the students' loneliness levels with respect to parents' education levels [$F(4,1998) = 8.74, p < .01$]. In Tukey test performed to find the reason of difference, it was found that the students whose mothers did not receive formal education have higher average score for loneliness ($\bar{X} = 27.03$) than those whose mothers graduated from primary school ($\bar{X} = 24.34$) or secondary school ($\bar{X} = 23.75$) or high school ($\bar{X} = 22.47$) or university ($\bar{X} = 22.48$). In addition, loneliness average scores of the students whose mothers graduated from primary school ($\bar{X} = 24.34$) are higher than the students whose mothers graduated from high school ($\bar{X} = 22.47$). It can be stated that loneliness feeling decreases in parallel with increased level of mother's education level.

There are few studies investigating effects of mother's education level on loneliness. The present results indicating that the children's loneliness level decreases with increased level of mother's education level are in agreement with the findings of Duyan et al. (2008) and Kozaklı (2006). Mothers especially play an important role in their children's growth. The familial relationships which individuals have developed during their childhood and the emotional bond between mother and child have effects on individual's healthy development. At this point, expertise of mother in raising children comes into focus. The mothers who have knowledge about child development, child psychology will behave more conscious towards their children than the mothers who do not have such expertise. It is considered that this situation is in parallel with the mother's education level. The higher level of education can cause mothers to have the higher level of awareness in raising children.

There is a significant difference among groups in relation to father's education level [$F(4,1987) = 12.94, p < .01$]. When reason of the difference was examined by Tamhane test, it was found that the difference between loneliness average score of the students whose fathers did not receive formal education ($\bar{X} = 26.30$) and those whose fathers graduated from high school ($\bar{X} = 22.78$) or university ($\bar{X} = 22.07$) is significant. In other words, the students whose fathers did not receive formal education have higher level of loneliness than those whose fathers graduated from high school or university. Similarly, the students whose fathers graduated from primary or secondary school were found to have higher level of loneliness in comparison with those whose fathers graduated from high school or university. Loneliness level of the students whose fathers graduated from high school or university is lower than those whose fathers did not receive formal education or graduated from primary or secondary school. It can be said that loneliness feeling tends to decrease with increased level of father's education level. The results of present study agree with the findings of Duyan et al. (2008) while those are not supported by Kozaklı (2006).

3.1.2. The students' loneliness levels with respect to parents' togetherness

There is a significant difference among the groups in respect to parents' togetherness [$F(3,1989) = 4.439, p < .05$]. When Tamhane test was applied to detect the reason of difference, it was seen that parents' togetherness does not have significant effect on loneliness level. Although loneliness average score of the students whose parents are divorced ($\bar{X} = 26.56$) and separated ($\bar{X} = 27.53$) is higher than the students whose parents are living together ($\bar{X} = 23.60$) and the students whose mother or father is not alive ($\bar{X} = 23.71$), it is considered that this difference is not significant because the number of the students whose parents are divorced ($n=83$) or living not together ($n=26$) or one of the parents is not alive ($n=53$) is low. The students whose parents are divorced and separated frequently experience loneliness in comparison with the students whose parents are living together and whose mother or father is not alive. However, this difference is not significant. According to the literature, Antognoli-Toland (2000) reported that the adolescents who live with a parent or within a complex family feel lonelier than the adolescents whose parents live together. Çivitçi and Çivitçi & Fiyakalı (2009) stated that loneliness level of the adolescents whose parents are divorced is higher than the adolescents whose parents live together. In addition to these results, the findings of Garnefski & Diekstra (1997) are not supported by the present study.

3.1.3. The students' loneliness level with respect to number of sibling

There is a significant difference among the groups in the students' loneliness scores with respect to number of siblings [$F(2,1990) = 6.44, p < .01$]. It was detected that the effect of number of siblings on loneliness scores is significant. When Tukey test was used to find the reason of difference, loneliness average score of the students having 3 or more siblings ($\bar{X} = 25.21$) was found to be higher than that of both the students who do not have a sibling ($\bar{X} = 23.34$) and the students having 1 or 2 siblings ($\bar{X} = 23.43$). In other words, loneliness level of the students having 3 or more siblings is higher than that of the students who do not have a sibling and the students who

have 1 or 2 siblings. The present results indicating positive correlation between increased number of siblings and loneliness are in agreement with the findings of Demirtaş (2007) and Duyan et al. (2008) while the results are not supported by Eren (1994) and Kozaklı (2006). Increased number of siblings can result in increased level of loneliness in children due to the fact that increased number of sibling means the parents allow children little time and money.

3.1.4. The students' loneliness levels with respect to level of income

There is a significant difference among the groups in respect to level of income [$F(2,1989) = 27.20$, $p < .01$]. The effect of level of income on loneliness scores was found to be important. When Tamhane test was used to detect the reason of the difference, it was seen that loneliness average score of the students with low level of income ($\bar{X} = 26.92$) is higher than that of the students having middle ($\bar{X} = 24.04$) or high ($\bar{X} = 22.20$) level of income. In other words, loneliness level of the students with low level of income was found to be higher than that of the students with middle or high level of income. The students' loneliness levels increase with decreased level of income. These result indicating negative correlation between level of income and loneliness level are also supported by many previous studies (Duyan et al. 2008; Le Roux, 2009; Williams, 1983; Gürsoy and Bıçakçı, 2006; Demir and Tarhan, 2001; Demirtaş, 2007).

3.1.5. The students' loneliness levels with respect to parents' status of work

Table 2. Loneliness average scores, standard deviations and t test results of secondary school students in relation to father's status of work

Loneliness Scores	n	\bar{X}	ss	t	p
Father works	1889	23.53	8.72	4.063	.000*
Father does not work	102	28.42	11.96		
Mother works	461	23.44	8.98	-9.36	.365
Mother does not work	1532	23.88	8.98		

* $p < .01$

As seen in Table 2, the students' loneliness average scores differentiate in relation to father's status of work ($sd=1992$, $t = 4.063$, $p < .01$). It is obvious that loneliness average scores of the students whose fathers do not work ($\bar{X} = 28.42$) are very high compared to the students whose fathers work ($\bar{X} = 23.53$). Accordingly, it can be said the students whose fathers do not work feel more lonesome than the students whose fathers work.

The effect of father's status of work on loneliness is closely related to the level of income. In previous studies by various authors, It was reported loneliness level tends to be decreased with increased level of income (Duyan et al., 2008; Le Roux, 2009; Williams, 1983; Gürsoy and Bıçakçı, 2006; Demir and Tarhan, 2001). However, the study conducted on adolescents by Demirtaş (2007) indicated that father's status of work does not have a significant effect on child's loneliness level, which is not in agreement with the present results.

The negative effect of unemployed fathers on loneliness may result from father's despondency due to his inability to provide for his family and also father's depression leading to inadequacy in taking care of children. In addition, this situation means that the family cannot live on enough money to participate in social activities. Feeling shamed because of unemployed father and financial difficulties, the child could not act to engage in any social activity resulting in loneliness.

There is no difference on loneliness average scores among the groups in relation to mother's status of work ($sd=1992$, $t = 9.36$, $p > .01$). This result is in agreement with the study of Bakır (2008) conducted on primary school students. The studies indicate that inadequacy of the time spent with the parents does not cause loneliness in

children but social support and acceptance provided by the parents (Minzi, 2006; Antognoli-Toland and Beard, 1999). Spending effective not too much time with the parents is important for healthy development of the children.

4. Conclusions and Implications

In the present study, it was revealed how parents' education levels, parents' togetherness, time spent with children by parents, level of income affect loneliness level in adolescents. Spending valuable time with educated parents is effective in healthy development of the children. The familial bond formed during childhood, especially between mother and child, is important for healthy personality development. The parents having expertise in child development and child psychology behave responsibly towards the children than the parents who do not expertise in such fields. Increased education levels of the parents have important roles in raising children because such parents exhibit high level of behaviour towards their children and they are good models for them. Therefore, it is important for the parents to be informed about effective parenthood, especially by school counselling services, in order for healthy development of the children. In addition, the parents should be informed about the negative situations and symptoms which their children faced and how they can effectively deal with these problems. As stated in the studies, the effective time spent with the children boosts the children's self-esteem. Consequently, it will be helpful for the parents to be given seminars by school counselling services on the methods of spending effective time with their children.

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